



FEMA

Buying Out Time

Gurnee, IL - As far as natural hazards go, the Village of Gurnee in Lake County, Illinois, is primarily affected by the flooding of the Des Plaines River. In the autumn of 1986, Gurnee suffered from the most devastating flood in its history. Since then, Gurnee has taken extraordinary steps to lessen flood damages to its properties, and the positive results can already be seen.

During the last week of August of 2007, Gurnee was once again threatened with rising floodwaters from the Des Plaines River. However, the effects of the flood were minimized thanks to two main mitigation efforts. The first was a wetlands restoration project that was recently completed by the Lake County Forest Preserve in an area north of Gurnee. The second involved a series of property acquisition projects pursued by Gurnee in the last 20 years.

Wetlands are areas that receive and accumulate floodwaters, thereby slowing and reducing downstream flows. They also serve as natural filters, improve water quality, and provide habitat for many species of fish, wildlife, and plants.

Over the centuries, many modifications to the landscape for agriculture and urban uses have significantly increased flooding from the Des Plaines River. The growing need for solutions to this problem resulted in the Des Plaines River Wetlands Demonstration Project.

Using funding provided by federal, state and local governments, foundation grants, and individual donors, the Wetlands Demonstration Project has transformed abandoned farm fields and gravel quarry pits into a rehabilitated ecosystem along the upper Des Plaines River in Lake County.

Restoration began in 1986, and the results have been very rewarding, especially for the residents of Gurnee, since the restored wetlands played a large role in delaying flood waters and reducing flood heights this last August.

After being selected by the Lake County Stormwater Management Commission (SMC) as a pilot for a community-wide plan in 2000, Gurnee started to aggressively pursue a Flood Mitigation Plan. Having a plan has opened doors for federal and state grants, and it has raised awareness in the community. Gurnee's Flood Mitigation Plan provides carefully considered directions to ensure the best use of public funds.

In 2003, Gurnee received a little over \$600,000 from a Pre-Disaster Mitigation Grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), which was administered by the Illinois Emergency Management Agency (IEMA). They also received approximately \$240,000 from the Illinois Department of Natural Resources (IDNR).

These grants helped them purchase five properties and remove them from the floodplain. Since 1986, Gurnee has successfully removed almost half of the 45 structures on the floodplain and returned those properties to open space, often using their own money when grants were not available.

Gurnee's village officials understand that it takes a combined effort, effective planning, and long-range vision to accomplish their goals.



Lake County,
Illinois



Quick Facts

Sector:

Public/Private Partnership

Cost:

Amount Not Available

Primary Activity/Project:

Acquisition/Buyouts

Primary Funding:

Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP)